

A Journey

Andrea Berchtold



Andrea migrated to Australia from Switzerland with a Dip. Commerce, completed a creative movement course with Marianne Buergin when she revisited her homeland and from here she started to expand her creativity as Designer and Event Manager. She connected with Mary Builth and Mary's dance therapy workshops "Women Who Run With the Wolves" and was instrumental in organising this event in Far North Queensland where Mary ended up staying and Andrea became Mary's pupil.

Following completion of a certificate in Theatre Production (University of Southern Queensland), focussing on Theatre Practice, Community Theatre, Political Theatre, and Children's Theatre and engaging at the same time with the local community by teaching circus skills (acro balancing) at the local primary schools and Youth Performing Groups, Andrea is furthering her physical theatre and acro skills by training with 'Legs on the Wall'. She also, completed a coaching certificate in sports-acrobatic and is currently teaching Commedia dell'Arte at regional High Schools. She was engaged by

Just Us Theatre Ensemble as an Audience Development Officer and participated in Community Cultural Development workshops and training in cross cultural skills for family and community workers run by Multicultural Affairs in Queensland. She completed a certificate in counselling at James Cook University and is a student in the IDTIA Dance Therapy Certificate course.

"Tanz und Bewegung ist fuer mich, was andere Menschen im Beten vielleicht erfahren. Es ist fuer mich ein Dank, dass ich lebe, dass ich hier bin, dass ich das alles sehen darf, alles hoeren darf, alles aufnehmen darf, Es ist also nicht ein Beten um Kraft oder um was immer. Es ist eher ein Dank."

Trudi Schoop, Los Angeles, 23.2.1988

(Dance and movement is for me what other people experience through prayer. For me it is a Thank-You for being alive, for being here, for being allowed to see, to hear and for taking it all in. Therefore it is not a prayer for strength or anything else. It is more just a Thank-You.)

Trudi's quote resonates strongly with my own dance and movement experiences. Never do I experience such a profound depth, communication with others and meaning in life as through dance. To explore the topic of human movement communicating with others in depth as part of my course, my Queensland tutor Mary Builth and I scheduled a tutorial on a May Monday morning. At the same time as discussing the topic during tutorial, we were also in the process of preparing the Julatten hall for dyading (witnessing of each others movement experience) and Mary's Monday evening class of dance. For the preparation the hall needed to be swept and mopped because the hall is frequently being utilised by community members for other various classes and activities.

Movement Experience 1.

The sweeping of the floor created a spontaneous functional movement that did not require much focus or attention but was a rather automatic movement with the result of "getting something done". Our awareness was not on the functional movement but rather on the discussion topic. Nevertheless the movement ran parallel to the discussion. Rudolf Laban developed the concept of movement as a common denominator (Ullman L., 1964) where he included functional movements. LMA (Laban Movement Analysis) provides a means of observation and analysis in terms of how the body projects itself into space, using effort/shape concepts". (Eckel D., 2003)

While discussing the topic and sweeping at the same time I started to connect the two, becoming increasingly aware of my movement pattern. Conversation suddenly focused on the possibility of a functional movement also revealing an inner experience as opposed to representing an actual way of doing something. My functional movement of direct, fairly strong, sustained and bound quality, described with Laban's physical language vocabulary was greatly influenced by the conversation and certainly revealed how I felt at the time. It is important though to keep in mind the following statement made in the DTAA Quarterly: "LMA does not offer any valid or accurately measured information about a person's psychological state inferred from their movement for the purpose of a multidisciplinary assessment, but could be of assistance in describing and assisting in terms of functionality and socialization". (Eckel D., 2003, p. 19)

While sweeping I started exploring my movement qualities by changing my inner attitude. Firstly I tried to have an "I don't care" attitude and immediately my functional movement of sweeping changed to indirect and loss of strength – with the functional result of loss of quality in the sweeping. Hence, I believe that an inner attitude reveals itself through movement and the quality of an actual way of doing something depends greatly on the movement awareness of the doer. Warren Lamb describes it as follows: "It is easy to see that the movement of a painter with his brush, a sculptor with his chisel, potter with his wheel and clay, musician with his instrument or a dancer with his body, all use movement in an enhanced form and could recognise that to study movement would help, perhaps, their technical performance creativity, self awareness, body/mind co-ordination." (Ullman L., 1964, p. 8)

The second trial was sweeping with an inner attitude of anger, which increased the original sweeping/movement quality of strong, bound and direct to the level of fighting quality with suddenness.

This little experience of exploring a functional movement provided me with great evidence of the fact that any movement (functional or not) will reveal an inner feeling or attitude. I certainly realised that the body doesn't lie and constantly communicates and reveals to others.

Trudi Schoop is a wonderful example for using functional everyday movements with patients to explore their inner feelings. In her book "*Come and dance with me*" she titled one of the chapters *Der Koerper ist eine Klatschbase*, which means that the

body is a gossip. She says: "Der Koerper sendet auch unsere Konflikte in die Welt hinaus." (The body sends our conflicts out to the world) (Schoop T., 1981, p. 63)

Her basic techniques include:

- Matching movement to a feeling
- Connecting fantasy with form
- Body-ego technique
- Mirroring
- Use of tension
- Humour

She had the ability to let patients repeat, imitate and perform an everyday functional movement and through exaggeration and reflection help them to laugh as well as accept themselves in a new, less judgmental fashion. She also helped to increase clients' body awareness, physical control, and range of functional/expressive movement and put great importance on teaching proper body use. (Levy F., 1988, p. 78)

Movement Experience 2.

Another personal profound movement experience was during a DMT weekend intensive where we were working in pairs. The first person was to internalise the feeling of being withdrawn. The second person was to find a contact point with "the patient" and try to influence and/or change their movement to hopefully produce a change in inner attitude. I took the role of being the patient and was surprised at how little time it took me to have a withdrawn, inward, cut-off-from-the-world feeling internalised and moving accordingly. My body was closed down and tense, but with a little rhythmic movement - my arms protecting my chest. During this particular experiment I was able to be my own witness; watching my movements and the inner feeling it produced. By becoming the feeling and identifying so much with it, I was also able to be moved by it. The movement consisted of very small, bound, rhythmic and tense movements. I became increasingly aware that despite hardly any physical and emotional contact points to the outer world and being totally withdrawn there was an incredible awareness in me. It was an awareness of my surroundings and myself but an inability to relate to them. The only body parts that were somehow relating to the world out there were my big toes drawing circles on the ground.

"My therapist", with sensitivity and matching movements tried to make contact with me. I was

very aware of her attempts but in no way able to respond to her. I believe my movements were an authentic expression of my inner state and feelings with my therapist mirroring and at times witnessing. My posture was indicative of the stress, tension and inner conflict stemming from opposing drives. Wendy Wyman-McGinty's quote comes to mind: "In authentic movement, the analyst acts as a silent witness to the patient's explorations." (Wyman-McGinty W., 1998, p. 239)

My own witness realised that my toes would have been the only contact point with "this patient" and I felt very strongly that I (patient) would have been able to respond to a "toe contact" from the outer world. It felt to me that my toes were like feelers and a safe distance away from the point where I had to withdraw from and the body part I had to protect the most.

"In therapy, the role of the therapist is essentially seeing the elements, seeing alternatives, suggesting alternatives, helping to frame and form the elements". (Berger M.R. & Leventhal M., 1988, p. 1)

That experience was so profound because I felt I was being moved, internalising such a strong inner attitude and was witnessing it all at the same time. I was also astounded by the lack of range of movement I showed, to the point of total inability to move, and, at the same time, humbled by the required sensitivity and ability to tune into a patient.

Liljan Espenak, an early DMT pioneer, developed a seven part movement diagnostic test to identify weakness and to strengthen the body. She based her principles on Laban, in addition to the psychoanalytic theories of Adler and the mind/body theories of Lowen. (Lowen A., 1967, 1973,) (Levy F., 1988, p. 52)

Liljan's method of diagnosing the range of movement of clients by applying (where appropriate) the above seven exercises makes sense to me now and supports my observation during my own movement experience with 'my therapist' during the experience I felt incredibly blocked, tense and unable to move because of my inner state. Encouraging clients to perform Espenak's diagnostic movements (when appropriate) will provide a therapist with important information on the client's movement range and ability and thus his/her inner state.

During the above movement experience I felt I developed my own personal, individual inner dance as described by Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman in Levy, (1988), "The focus on individual self-expression and exploration has sometimes been

referred to by dance therapists and modern dancers as contacting one's "inner dance." (Levy, F. 1988, p. 5)

With growing awareness of body movement I believe that even in our deepest inner dances is a universality. It is this universality that resonates in an audience. Evidence to this statement is my experience in Mary Buih's dance class. Supported by a theme and music, we create and generate our own inner dance during a process of non-verbal association where each individual permits her body to move spontaneously and unguardedly. Trudy Schoop called this "doodling" with the body. (Levy, 1988, p.88) After the initial improvisational movement activity we are encouraged to plan and repeat the dance/movement sequences and show the outcome or movement formulation to another participant, for witnessing. These dances are part of the process of focusing inward on one's bodily-felt experience, images and feelings and are a communication from our unconscious to others. Our dances are personal expressions that provide universal insights about human condition and therefore become meaningful. If our inner dance would lack a universality our "audience" would not be able to relate to our "performance". It is my experience though that every single time we witness someone's personal inner dances we are touched by the performances and the movements resonate deeply within us.

A secondary, very positive, outcome of Mary's dance classes has been the increase of strength and flexibility of my expressive movement vocabulary, which had/has a positive impact on my ability to deal and cope with life situations. Hence, I developed a stronger self-esteem.

"... Movement not only speaks through an object; a living organism owes its final form to it; movement leads to growth and structure.... (Laban quoted in Bartenieff and Lewis, 1980, p.1)

Movement Experience 3.

I would like to mention another very personal movement experience to support the above observations. As part of the dance therapy course we were asked to think of a story that keeps on coming up. Write about it, draw it and then dance it.

I took this opportunity to address my cervical cell change through movement. Unsure on how to go about it I trusted the right moment to show itself. It was easy to write about it. There were the facts and feelings in regards to it. At that stage I was unaware or, more so, thought wrongly about why the cell change occurred. My mind had made up a story that

seemed plausible at the time but never did I ask my body or moved it.

The following statement by Miriam Roskin Berger resonates with me in regards to trust in a healing process: “The therapist allows the intuitive, psychic, healing, creative, internal forces to emerge, and trusts them to provide form and meaning to the transformational process in therapy”. (Berger M.R. & Leventhal M., 1988, p. 1)

A few days later, after writing down the facts and while listening to music by Ravel, my body went into a spontaneous movement session. I felt moved to move. I saw a clear image of my cervix with jagged black edges. My movements started out being very undulating, indirect, and erratic. After a while a pattern arose with the majority of movement being generated by my arms, creating a circle. At the time I felt intense emotional pain, hurt and blame. It felt like it was the fault of others and I knew I wanted to change this feeling. I stayed with the movement and let it evolve very slowly as to become more aware of the conflict. My movements expanded and slowly transformed to clearer, stronger, indirect but slow, rhythmic and bound movements. As the movements became clearer and more direct I felt in myself calmer, lighter and centred. The strong circle I created with my arms felt safe and nurturing at the same time. Having created this space gave me room to honour myself. Movements became very vertical, direct and strong. Repeating the movement for a long time reinforced the positive feeling that went with it. Enlarging the movement and exaggerating it ingrained it even more into my body. The reinforcement of the feeling of strength gave room for playfulness. Images changed from the original black to pink, pulsating and vibrant.

Unfortunately I had no witness to that experience but repeating the movement later in front of a mirror made the inner transformation evident.

Liljan Espenak also believes that “music can be applied with great advantage in the therapeutic program. Both cathartic and directive techniques can be used if the patients face difficulties in moving, be it for psychological or physiological reasons, the music often aids them in forgetting either their lack of mobility, or their inhibitions through the presence of others. It acts as a catalyst to their feelings, they can “give in” and “forget themselves”, they can receive new thoughts and impulses, or it can reinforce and intensify their experience. (Espenak L., 1949, p. 7/8)

From this third movement experience I learnt that my movements communicate even if there is no other witness other than myself. Being a receptive

witness to myself gave my body and movement the opportunity to speak to me. To progress in the healing process I would still recommend being supported by a therapist so as to be able to be totally the client. This would allow for full exploration of the issue without the responsibility of being the witness and therapist as well. (Norquay, 2004, p. 5/6)

From my experience it is evident to me that all human movement communicates and reveals inner experience and that human movement speaks a universal physical language. Heightened body awareness and movement analysis tools greatly help to read this language but the most important aspect in reading physical language I believe would be our own inner experiences, intuition and trust in the process.

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